

Local zanies test skills, endurance

By Stephanie Salter

Into watching people try to do things that will probably hurt them and possibly bring them to their knees? Then Saturday's "Escape from Alcatraz," is just what the sadist ordered.

It isn't the Clint Eastwood movie but probably it ought to be one. The event, sponsored by the Dolphin Club of San Francisco, is a triathlon in the rugged tradition of Hawaii's "Iron Man" competition. The object is simple: getting from Alcatraz Island to Mill Valley, but getting there is not half the fun. Some 30 to 50 members of the Dolphin and Southside Rowing Clubs are scheduled to jump into the Bay at 9:45 Saturday morning, make the 1½-mile swim from "The Rock" to the Dolphin Club at Aquatic Park. There they will hop aboard bicycles for a 15-mile ride across the Golden Gate Bridge to Mill Valley. Then the tough part starts. Those still in the running will do exactly that — run the Dipsea race course to Stinson Beach, turn around and come back.

Two Dolphin Club members, Jack Bettencourt and Stan Hlynsky, went through a trial run of the entire

competition Monday, "really slowly, just to get a feel for it," and it took them 6½ hours. "I was just completely zonked out the next day," said Hlynsky, 36, a longshoreman and vice president of the Dolphin Club.

Neither man is what anyone would call soft. Hlynsky is a 200-pounder, who swims a mile a day in the Bay, runs from four to six miles daily and lifts weights when he isn't working up a sweat on the docks. Bettencourt, 52, is a San Francisco salesman and the oldest member of Saturday's field, but he, too, runs, swims and bikes on a daily basis, and was an All-America boxer during his collegiate days at Cal Poly-San Luis Obispo.

Both men realize people think they're crazy to attempt such a grueling venture, but since when has peer pressure ever dissuaded Dolphin Club members from doing weird things — like swimming in the 55-degree, treacherous waters of San Francisco Bay?

"It's something you're aware of yourself that you have done," said Hlynsky, who competed in the Hawaiian triathlon and helped convince the Dolphin board of directors that their club should put on something similar. "It was right after our fire, and it

seemed like a good thing to do to draw attention to the club and to San Francisco."

But because of the inherent physical danger involved in the event — from potential hypothermia, broken bones, collisions with autos or even heart failure — the club decided to limit participation to themselves and their next-door neighbor, the rowing club. "But people have heard about it and want to join in," Hlynsky said. "I got 15 calls yesterday alone. Maybe we'll do one that's open to about 70 people in September or October."

Bettencourt, who insists he is doing the Escape from Alcatraz for the same reason he exercises regularly, "fun," emphasized the real difficulty of a triathlon.

"You can be the fastest swimmer or best runner or have biked for years, but putting all three back-to-back is the thing," he said. "Balance is the key."

Being a 200-pounder, coming late in life to swimming and suffering from at least four injuries he has incurred while training for the Escape, Hlynsky looks at each step of the race "one at a time. And I'll never be at a loss out there for good conversation because I talk to myself the whole way, in the

water, on the bike and on the trail."

Getting through that first leg of the event is most definitely no picnic, through the icy and usually choppy waters of the Bay. The Dolphin members are so respectful of the riptides and swells that frequent the Bay that Dolphins will count as valid any point of shore arrival for a triathlete. But then, instead of the traditional sauna or loll in the sun, their blue bodies go onto the bikes for a head-to-header with the automobile. With leg muscles singing 15 miles later, the Double Dipsea awaits.

"I have a friend who ran the Boston Marathon in 2:30. His best time in the Dipsea has been 1:58," Hlynsky said of the 7.1-mile course. "This podiatrist I know told me, 'You guys are nuts to try this.'"

And it isn't just guys. Several Dolphin members are women, planning to participate Saturday. One, Susanna Spencer-Horner, a swim coach at the University of California, is considered a good bet to finish the Escape first.

But that's another thing about these triathletes. If Spencer-Horner does finish first, there will be no winner's trophy. She will receive a patch like



Examiner/John Storey

Jack Bettencourt (L) and Stanley Hlynsky smile before triathlon

everyone else who finishes and a jacket like everyone else who even participates.

"We figure, whoever finishes is a winner," Bettencourt said.
Not to mention a survivor.